

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor males who have sex with males,^[a]¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor the verbally abusive, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And some of you were those types of people. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ^[b] and by the Spirit of our God.

New Car, New Rules

With new cars come new rules. For years we had the same old VW Vanagon, lovingly referred to as the gutless slug with just enough power to get out of its own way. That car was in our family for almost 20 years and it was one of the only vehicles we ever knew. There was a bite mark in the vinyl upholstery, dried milkshake spilled between the cracks of the seats, and multiple minor dings and dents all around. But one day almost out of the blue my parents bought a Toyota Sienna and when that car was new there were new rules. It was almost as if we couldn't even drink a milkshake in that car apparently we had a history. We were older but they still didn't trust us and we had to care for the new, keep that new car smell, try not to ruin it, which meant keeping us out of it.

I might compare Christianity to that new car and when you first drive it off the lot you're careful, you watch out for anything that may hurt or harm the new faith. But slowly over time we think it doesn't matter we'll park closer to the store where people don't care about whose door they open theirs into. But Christianity isn't a new car that grows old over time. It's like a new car we step into every day.

And Paul wants us to keep it that way. But he's not writing a list of qualifications for entrance into the kingdom of God, now chewing on the seats, no milkshakes, and watch out for other car doors - but he's saying, "This is who you are. This is the new you."

But Corinth seems to be having trouble understanding this concept. The congregation in Corinth saw their bodies as the old jalopy on its way to the junk yard, might as well do a few donuts and burn out on the way. Who really cares if you blow a tire, they're shot... hit the rev limiter, it's okay as long as we make it, if not we can always flat tow it in. The Corinthians thought they could abuse their bodies because we won't need them where we're going. But they fail to understand who they are right now.

Paul knows his audience and yet even in their permissive culture he doesn't lower his standards in order to avoid disappointment, just one milkshake... No, he announces God's judgment on Sin. *⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

At first it appears as if Paul is just tossing out a grab bag of sins for us to pick and choose but people usually only focus on male prostitutes and homosexual offenders. But there are ten sins. Paul seems to carefully balance out sexual and non-sexual sins and those fall between “*will not inherit the kingdom of God.*”

The sexually immoral that simply means those who have sex outside of marriage. The root of the word comes from bad or harmful not only because of the damage it can do to one another, but the damage it does to the family born outside of marriage and the damage done to society. It places the desires of the individual above each other, the community. It's pure selfishness which is what idolatry is. Idolatry is not only worshiping images but worshipping self. After idolatry is adultery, those who are married but act as if they are not, they divide the family and hurt the children who are ripped from mother or father. Finally there are the *μαλακοὶ* - not Malachai (Hebrew name). This could be the passive partner in a same sex relationship. It doesn't simply refer to homosexuality, which comes later. It means something along the lines of soft-men, not necessarily effeminate but it's often used for the cowardly soldier, afraid of carrying out their duties. It's moral softness. It puts self-first over others. It loves oneself above others. It abdicates responsibility. It runs away. It gives up. Finally there are the homosexual offenders.

But it would be wrong for us to focus in on one or two and say, “These are grave sins. Certainly serious,” while ignoring the others. That's like looking at the hubcaps when the rod neck should be your real concern; or a scratch in the paint when the floor boards are rusted through. It's not the sins of others that exclude from the kingdom of God – it's your own. Paul is an all-inclusive kind of guy and he doesn't want anyone to feel left out he follows those five with five more.

Theft... we know it's wrong to steal from people. People would agree it's wrong to steal from individuals but they really don't have a problem with it when it comes to corporations. Instead of stealing from one person we think it's okay to steal from many at the same time and it's even better if you can get the government to do it for you. And yet it's still theft. Theft is driven by greed and our desire to have more. Paul writes against a materialistic culture which is always looking for the next best thing. Paul writes against the swindlers and their ruthless business practices. He writes against those who are verbally abusive also known as gossipers, and those who struggle with alcohol.

These are all equally condemning as the others. These aren't qualifications these are God's expectations for those who call themselves Christians. Those who fall into these sins and fail to repent of them *will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Do not be deceived.* Don't let anyone fool you and don't dare fool yourself. Sin separates from God. We should not inherit the kingdom of God. Like a kid with a milkshake in a new car, dog to its vomit, or a freshly bathed pig to its wallow, a fool to his folly, or children of God who were washed that return to the filth from which they came

God certainly has the right to expect something to be what he created it to be.

If we were to read the first half and not what followed we should all fall into despair, because we haven't lived up to God's expectations and Paul clearly places them between "*will not inherit the kingdom.*" All this demonstrates that we are not some old car headed off to the junk yard. We're more like the car that is rusted to the ground, unable to move, and not worth the effort to drag there. *But you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified.* The Greek repeats the adversative article, "But," for emphasis. That says, "In spite of who you were, this is what God has done for you."

But then God came along, washed you, removing layers of dirt and filth. He sanctified you. That means upon remaking you in his image he sets you aside for his purpose, not so we can live for ourselves but for him who died for us. He justified you through the life, death, and resurrection of his son. Paul writes, "*That is what you were.*" You were thieves, adulterers, greedy, gossipers, idolaters, following ruthless business practices. But by the power of God, "*Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are no longer under law but under grace.*" We have failed and fallen into temptation but Paul doesn't say, "What you are," rather, "What you were."

You are now a Christian - a child of God. You may have been those things but that is now who you are now. You are a new you. You were washed through the waters of baptism. You were adopted into God's family, brought into his Kingdom with the new car smell, the Spirit is poured out over you generously; you are connected to Jesus' life. You are sanctified. I can't remember where I heard it but sanctification is best described as putting a newly purchased dog in your new car and driving home. The dog then proceeds to chew its way out of the box, chew on the seat, soil the carpet, and throw up from motion sickness. But that puppy has been sanctified for a specific purpose - to be the family dog. And while a dog may make a mess in the car, return to its vomit - You are not a dog. You are a child.

God doesn't give up so easily on us. *You were justified.* These things have been done to you and for you. *You are* made righteous before God in the name of Jesus. Who died and gave you his life of perfection. Who lives and empowers us with his Word and the Spirit whom he sends - so that we are not mastered by sin but so we can struggle against it.

You are forgiven for even the worst of sins in Paul's list of 10. You are forgiven even if that sin isn't listed here. You are forgiven even for the grievous sin of gossiping and stealing from others what doesn't belong to you. God wants you fully assured of it, which is why everything in worship centers on that. From the opening words which recall our baptism and remind us God is with us, to the confession and absolution that follow, to Lord's Supper, and then our response to the Words and Works of God. We can rejoice.

When the woman who was caught in adultery was brought before Jesus, he didn't say, "You're forgiven, carry on as you were." He said, "*Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.*" So Paul says to the Corinthians and I say to myself and to you. Live as you are. Not as you want to be but as God has already made you. That doesn't mean you won't have to struggle against sin or that you won't sometimes fall into temptation but that you wage war against it. Repentance consists of a

desire to do better and a belief that sin is forgiven. Live as you are, the new you, so that others too may come to know their savior and then rejoice because God's Word tells you who you are even when you don't feel like it.

That doesn't mean faith wears out like the Old Van. It's made new every day even if your car isn't. Someday we may replace our van but that doesn't our children shouldn't take care of it, because one day, "It could be theirs, too." Maybe they'll drive it to the junk yard, maybe they won't. Either way this isn't about cars, it's about you and who you are in Christ. You are not a restoration, not a rebuild, but a new you. Amen.